

Bat Conservation Trust

Bats in Churches

and how you can help them



The relationship between bats and churches goes back a long way. As Britain was gradually deforested over thousands of years to make way for settlements, roads and crops, bats adapted to use buildings as roosts in addition to trees and caves. Parish churches have been enduring features of the landscape and some have provided valuable roosting sites for many generations of bats, particularly in areas where alternative roosts are scarce. Around 60% of pre-16th Century churches contain bat roosts. Therefore, churches play an important role in helping to protect our native bats.

Bats in Churches

At least eight species of bat use churches for roosting including common and soprano pipistrelles, brown long-eared bats, Natterer's bats and serotines. They often roost at eaves level, particularly in the corners of the naves and aisle or in the porch, and sometimes under roof tiles or lead-covered boarding. Contrary to popular belief, belfries are often too draughty, dusty and noisy for bats!

Bats usually return each year to squeeze into the same favoured crevice where they feel safe; behind a beam or occasionally behind pictures or other hangings. Bats are mainly active between spring and autumn, but may also spend the winter hibernating in unheated parts of a church. Bats may perceive the spacious interior of a church to be somewhat like the canopy of a woodland. They may fly around inside before emerging to feed or on returning. Some bats will use porches or other areas as shelters between bouts of feeding, even if they roost elsewhere. Churchyards can be a good source of nearby food, essential when young bats are first learning to fly or when the weather is unfavourable.

Church renovation work can unwittingly disturb and endanger bat colonies. In mid-summer the young are at particular risk of being abandoned by their mothers if the roost is disturbed. In any season, the bats can be entombed or excluded from their roosting site accidentally. Such events can be avoided by consulting bat experts for advice well in advance of undertaking work. It is also important to avoid placing lights where they will shine directly onto the roost entrance as this can delay emergence so that the bats miss the peak insect time when feeding.





Bat facts

- All 18 of the bat species known to occur in the UK feed on insects. A tiny pipistrelle can consume up to 3000 midges and other small insects each night, so in active months bats are a natural control on insect numbers.
- When insects are scarce during winter, bats hibernate, lowering their body temperature to conserve energy and waking only periodically.
- In summer, females form maternity colonies where each gives birth to a single young. Local populations take a long time to recover if damaged.
- All bats and their roosts are protected, whether they are present or not.
- Bats are not blind but their eyesight is aided by their sophisticated echolocation system which enables them to catch insects and find their way in the dark.
- Bats are not rodents, they do not gnaw wood or cables and they do not build nests, instead they roost in existing spaces such as crevices in stone walls, gaps behind beams or under roof tiles.
- Bat droppings consist mainly of insect remains and are usually very dry and crumbly. They present no significant health hazard in the UK.
- Bats may live up to thirty years and return faithfully to the same roosting site every year.

Why are bats protected?

All UK bat populations are protected by law because of the severe declines they suffered during the last century. The loss of habitats, use of insecticides and agricultural intensification have reduced the numbers and variety of insects available on which they depend for food. Bats have also suffered from the loss of old trees and buildings used for roosting, the use of toxic chemicals during timber treatment, and deliberate killing. Many churches provide reliable roosts giving much needed security and opportunities for feeding close to home in churchyards.



Grounded bats

Bats may occasionally be found on the ground during daylight hours, in which case they are likely to be sick or injured. If you see a bat on the ground, please call the BCT Helpline in the first instance. Bats are gentle creatures and seldom show any aggression, but they are wild animals and, when grounded, may be frightened or in pain. Most of the UK's bats have such small teeth that a bite will not break the skin. However, because a rabies-type virus has been found in a very small number of British bats, you should handle the bat as little as possible and always wear thick protective gloves. This will ensure the small risk of transmission is avoided completely. For more information about bats and rabies, please visit the BCT website.

Bats in Churches

- There are 18 species of bat in the UK, some of which are extremely rare.
- Many churches have provided refuges for bats for hundreds of years.
- By welcoming or tolerating bats in your church, you can make an important contribution to their survival.
- For more information about bats in churches see the reverse of this booklet. To be put in touch with your local bat group contact the Bat Conservation Trust.



Bat Conservation Trust



Quadrant House, 250 Kennington Lane, London, SE11 5RD
Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228 • Email enquiries@bats.org.uk • Website www.bats.org.uk

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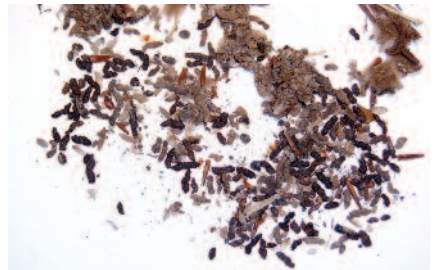


Help and advice for your church

Bats and their roosts are protected from harm and disturbance. Works such as remedial timber treatment, the installation of floodlighting, structural repairs and roof renovations can be harmful to bats. The relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO), see back of leaflet, can provide advice on how to stay within the law and minimise the impact of works on bats. General advice about bats is free and the service may include a site visit. However, some types of work may require a Habitats Regulations licence and the help of an ecological consultant. To avoid project delays it is important that the presence of bats is taken into account when work to the fabric of churches is planned. Seek advice from the SNCO as early as possible.

The SNCO and BCT's Bat Helpline can provide information on a range of other queries, including the management of bats in church buildings. Often the number of bats in a church is small and so colonies may even go unnoticed. For many churches, simple low-cost techniques can be employed to manage the bats' presence. Occasionally, a larger colony may be present and during the months in which the bats are most active, the droppings may cause problems for those cleaning the church. In this situation, seek advice from the BCT Bat Helpline and if droppings or urine are observed to damage the historic fabric of the church building or its contents, also consult a specialist conservator or denominational historic buildings adviser. A range of short and long term approaches may be recommended. Some may be quite simple, such as temporarily relocating artefacts further from the bats' roost or flight path, others more complicated. The approaches taken to mitigate issues relating to bat urine and droppings are constantly being updated and improved, so if you have a problem, contact the relevant bodies for the most up-to-date advice.

The many clergy and congregations who welcome or tolerate bats in their churches make an important contribution to the conservation of bats and the care of the natural world. However, if your church needs extra support about a specific issue, the SNCO should be contacted through the BCT Bat Helpline for advice. Due to the large size and complex construction of churches, excluding bats entirely is rarely possible, but every effort will be made to find a solution.



Bat droppings

For more detailed information on the management of bats in churches please refer to Natural England Technical Information Note (TIN043) *Bats in Churches - A management guide* available from the BCT website or from Natural England.



What you can do

- Spread the word that bats are vulnerable and need your church's help. Display the poster in the centre of this leaflet on your church or parish noticeboard for all to see.
- Go batty in Sunday school. There are plenty of ideas for children's activities available on our website.
- Organise a church bat walk. Contact your local bat group who may be able to provide someone to help lead a bat walk to see what species are living in and around the church. For details of your nearest bat group contact BCT or visit our website.
- Churchyards rich in native flowers and trees that attract insects will benefit bats and other wildlife; minimise the use of pesticides and create corners for wildflowers.
- Join the Bat Conservation Trust or the Young Batworker's Club. Individual, family and teacher/youth leader memberships are available. To become a member contact BCT or visit our website to join online.
- Monitor the bats in your church. Take part in the National Bat Monitoring Programme by counting your colony twice each summer. For more information and to sign up contact BCT or visit our website.
- Remember, if bats live in your church, you are strongly recommended to contact the relevant SNCO for advice before work is planned that could affect the bats. If you aren't sure whether bats are present or not, it is safer to assume that they may be and seek advice anyway.



With the help of church communities, we hope to ensure that bats are around for future generations to enjoy.

The future for bats

The Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) wants a future where everyone, everywhere can enjoy seeing and hearing bats as a natural part of their environment. At many churches there is already a protective attitude towards the bats sheltered within the building. A sympathetic approach and tolerance are invaluable for the conservation of these vulnerable animals.



Useful contacts

The Bat Conservation Trust (BCT)

Quadrant House, 250 Kennington Lane, London, SE11 5RD.

Call the Bat Helpline today on **0345 1300 228** or visit **www.bats.org.uk**

Email **enquiries@bats.org.uk**

Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations (SNCOs)

Natural England

Telephone 0845 600 3078

www.naturalengland.org.uk

Countryside Council for Wales

Telephone 0845 1306 229

www.ccw.gov.uk

Scottish Natural Heritage

Telephone 01463 725000

www.snh.gov.uk

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Telephone 02890 546 558

www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/

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